

C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 003342

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/10/2014
TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM KDEM VE
SUBJECT: VENEZUELA REGIONAL ELECTIONS: VIEWS FROM CARABOBO
STATE

Classified By: Abelardo A. Arias, Political Counselor, for
Reason 1.4(d)

Summary

¶11. (C) Political party representatives in Carabobo State each told Poloff October 21 that polls showed its candidate in the lead in the gubernatorial race, and in a majority of mayoral races. Chavez's Fifth Republic Movement (MVR) representative asserted that Chavista candidates would sweep all the races on October 21. Proyecto Venezuela dismissed COPEI and Primero Justicia concerns about the electoral registry, but joined in their worries about high abstention rates and possible violence if voters turned out but were not allowed to count paper ballots after polls closed. End Summary.

Proyecto Venezuela's Solitary Can Do Attitude

¶12. (C) Maria Eugenia Hands, Director of Communication for Proyecto Venezuela (PV) in Carabobo State, confident that current PV Governor Henrique Salas Feo would be reelected on October 31. Hands told Poloff October 21 that current polls showed Salas Feo ahead of MVR candidate Luis Acosta Carles by about 30 points, and third party candidate Jose Gregorio Ruiz with no more than 5% of the vote. A high abstention rate could hurt Salas Feo, Hands said so she qualified it as a "close" race. Hands said PV was also likely to win four or five of the 13 mayoralties, while other opposition parties would probably win three. Hands speculated that after the regional elections the divide between PV and the opposition could grow wider. She pointed out that while many opposition parties supported Salas Feo for governor, for most the support was in name only.

¶13. (C) Proyecto Venezuela was not concerned about the problems with the electoral registry, Hands noted, because the registry has always had problems. Instead, she said, the party is worried about how the votes will be counted when polls close. Hands said the PV campaign strategy is to MOTIVATE the middle class to vote, EDUCATE the lower class on how to use electronic voting machines, and have voters stay at the polls and GUARD their votes on election day. Hands asserted that the middle class in Carabobo were most likely to abstain because of conflicting messages and a sense of defeat from the "stolen" referendum. While the middle class had to be motivated, Hands said, lower class voters were inexperienced with technology and needed to be educated on how to vote to make sure they did it correctly.

Full Steam Ahead: MVR

¶14. (C) Movimiento Quinta Republica's (MVR) Secretary General for Carabobo State, Luis Medina told Poloff October 21 that the MVR has taken advantage of the opposition's weakness and their division and would continue to do so in the regional elections. Medina asserted that MVR candidate Acosta Carles would become governor of Carabobo, and the MVR would sweep all 14 mayoralties. (Note: Carabobo State has 14 mayoralties; one of which is an administrative municipality and does not elect a mayor on October 31.) Medina compared the opposition to spoiled children who if given concessions would continue to make more outrageous demands or claims. According to Medina, this showed it would be impossible to work with the opposition. He said the CNE could not agree to the opposition's requests for fear of opening a floodgate of requests and challenges.

Chavez's Little Party That Could: Podemos

¶15. (C) On October 21, poloff also met with Oscar Perez, Regional Secretary General of Carabobo State for Podemos.

Perez asserted that Podemos was backing Chavista candidates in Carabobo and hoped to contribute 20% to the Chavista vote.

In the regional elections, Perez said, political parties were more important than in the referendum and were working

in tandem with Comando Maisanta. Perez predicted that Chavista candidates would win 9 of the 13 mayoralties and the gubernatorial race. Perez noted that according to four recent polls, MVR candidate Acosta Carles was ahead of Proyecto Venezuela's Salas Feo by seven points.

Reasons for Worry: COPEI and Primero Justicia

16. (C) COPEI's Lucio Herrera and Hector Pinero told Poloff October 21 that while Proyecto Venezuela's Henrique Salas Feo was ahead by 10 points, his selfishness had cost him a stronger lead in the polls and the active support of other opposition parties. If abstention rates are higher than 50%, Herrera said, then Salas Feo would probably lose the governor's race. Herrera estimated that the opposition had a good chance of winning 7 of the 13 mayoralties, including Valencia, the state capital and largest city in Carabobo. Herrera and Pinero said they were concerned about the electoral registry and the conflicting message of fraud and abstentions that voters were receiving from different opposition political parties. They pointed out that if opposition voters did go to the polls on election day, the possibility of violence was high unless the CNE instructed poll workers and the military guarding the polls to allow the people to observe the paper ballots being counted after the polls closed.

17. (C) Local Primero Justicia representatives said Salas Feo was ahead in the polls by a small margin, and asserted that the opposition would win 7 of the 13 mayoralties. They reiterated Proyecto Venezuela and COPEI concerns about conflicting messages, high abstention rates and possible violence if voters turned out to vote but were not allowed to observe paper ballots being counted after polls closed. Primero Justicia's Ruben Dario noted the importance of winning the gubernatorial race and the Valencia mayoralty to protect civil liberties and the right of the people to march in protest.

Comment

18. (C) Despite some opposition concerns, political party representatives in Carabobo believe his/her favored candidate is doing well in a close race. The most important factor, as they note, is the possible abstention, and one that will hurt candidates identified as opponents of President Hugo Chavez. Governor Henrique Salas Feo has a solid political base and the foundation incumbency provides. His boorish chief rival, known for his televised burp during a confrontation with a Coca Cola distributor, however, has struck a chord with lower class voters and fully enjoys the financial backing of the central government...a combination that may prove to be hard to beat.

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